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Earnings

William Estill Phipps



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YEARNINGS

BY

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YEARNINGS

TWO FISHERMEN

The rustic stood by the fountain side,
And trolled his line in the plashing tide;
With ardent eye and heart-beat fast,
He hooked a fish at every cast.
But he saw no charm in stream or hill,
For his soul was dead to rapture's thrill—
He was only a fisher of fish.

The poet sat by the self-same stream;
He cast his hook in the ripple's gleam,
And he tossed it in and toyed it out
In vain to tempt the wary trout.
A-weary, he thought, "I will depart;
Each man has work, each worker his art;
I am not a fisher of fish.

But his restless passion to beguile,
The woodbird twittered, "Remain awhile,"
And gems beamed out in the spray's bright drops,
Perfume rose from the flowering copse,
The waters murmured a song unique,
A breeze blew down from the mountain peak
And he said, "It's the breath of God."

The breath of God, with a touch serene,
Transformed the brook to glittering sheen—
To an ancient vase, of rustic mould,
Wherein he fished with a hook of gold;
And the sirens chanted as he wrought,
For pearls of price were the fish he caught,
And he said, "I'm a fisher of men."

RESCUED

'Tis dark; the murky fog hangs thick and low,
The breakers roll, and jagged rocks project.
Transfixed, aghast, I sit but to reflect:
Soon o'er my barque the turbid tide will flow,
And crush me down in grimy moss below—
I sink!—but see—kind heaven doth allow
A beacon light—that light, dear love, art thou.

'Tis dark; the wintry wind doth howl and rave;
My path lies over hills and rugged rifts,
Where rocks rise high and lies the snow in drifts—
Destruction's brink I've reached, no power can save.
"All lost!" I cry, "behold the yawning grave!"
When lo! a cloud is reft, and there, I vow,
A beacon star—that star, dear love, art thou.

'Tis dark; intimidating clouds o'er-spread,
And dread emotions of the soul rise high.
The vanities of life I now decry;
Ambition, valor, hope and love have fled;
Bereft of these, 'tis better to be dead—
Despair! despair! yet comes there even now
A vision bright—that angel, love, art thou.

SWEETHEART

Sweetheart, sweetheart! the evening winds are sigh-
ing

A requiem in the spectral cyprus tree—
Sweet, melancholy love!—yet sadder, sweeter
Are these endearing words from you to me,
“Sweetheart, sweetheart.”

Sweetheart, sweetheart! the roses nod and whisper,
While morning zephyrs kiss away the dew—
Communing love in vesperal tones fantastic,
And yet they can not say, as I to you,
“Sweetheart, sweetheart.”

Sweetheart, sweetheart! the wood-bird, from his
bower
Of green and blossoms, sings above his nest,
And tells his mate of heart-love by his music—
Yet these dear words ne'er echo from his breast,
“Sweetheart, sweetheart.”

Sweetheart, sweetheart! the mermaid woos her lover,
By moon-light glimmer, on the coral reef,
With siren strains, in concert with the breakers,
And fain would sing with mortal love and grief,
“Sweetheart, sweetheart.”

“Sweetheart, sweetheart”—words spoken not in
heaven—
For angels can not love as mortals do—
But sympathy of Eros gave this measure
To tell, in part, my burning love to you,
Sweetheart, sweetheart.

CRATER LAKE

'Tis June, serene: On Cascade's rugged side,
Spring zephyrs melt the snow, and hardy flowers
Bloom gorgeously, supplanting its cold wake.
Aroma, sweet, the cragged, lusty wilds,
And quaint, blithe songs of merry birds revive
The weary pilgrim's steps, while trudging on
O'er lava soil that echoes every sound.
The winding path leads on from height to height
Like stair-steps trod by fabled Brobdingnags,
And every step anticipates the goal.

Fancy exaggerate portrays the scene—
The grandeur that shall burst upon the sight;
Yet when, from final height, itself appears,
Conception proves a disappointment dire:
Appalled! both joy and pain, a flood of tears
At seeing what one seemed prepared to see;
Approach the over-towering brink and gaze,
Transfixed, aghast, upon the jagged rim
That cups and hedges in (Oh, rugged vase!)
The placid lake ten thousand links below.

Now, while the sunrays fall athwart
And paint in rainbow tints and divers hues
Or prismatic blend the eye ne'er saw before,
Sublimity transports in ecstasy;
And yet hold fast, for lo! yon signal stands—
Yon frowning, beacon crater lifts its head
To warn you that the fascinating god
Of grandeur lurks therein; and see the chasm,
With gaping mouth wide spread to drink you up,
Inverted in the measureless abyss,
The blue infinity of heaven allures,
An irresistible desire to leap
Pervades the soul, and now you clutching stand
In ecstasies of heaven, in pangs of hell.

Of, thou weird, solitary sentinel!
The most majestic work of nature-god!
Would that the artist's brush could imitate
Thy craggy stretch of wall to its great depth,
And mock the brilliant tints that emanate
From thy unfathomed, mystic, limpid sea;
Or that the awe-struck bard could sing in words
The psalm that thrills the soul while viewing thee.
The years thy monumental awe hast stood
Ere savage man eschewed thy brink in dread,
And fled thy fabled ghouls, are known alone
To Him whom thy sublimity portrays,
And yet in embryo when nations crouch
Upon thy verge, and call thee "Queen Sublime."

The moralist, who climbs to Wisdom's peak
Beholds alluring gems in Hope's fair bow,
Yet sees more clearly Superstition's Gulf,
Dark Sea of Ignorance, the heaven, the hell.

A VALENTINE

Said an owl to a maid, one beautiful night,
While the moon rose high in the skies:
"I love you fair creature, your eyes are so bright—
Give heed to the words of the wise:

"The animal man is a bundle of lust,
Ambition, avarice and pride,
A slow-plodding creature that trails in the dust,
While I on the whirlwind can ride.

"Fly away to the hills, dear maiden, with me,
I will make you the queen of my nest,
You shall sail in a boat on solitude's sea,
And rest with your head on my breast."

"Kind sir," said the maid—and her eyes filled with
tears,
"Your wish would at once be obeyed,
Were it not for the fact that, thro' coming years,
The people would call me 'owl maid.'"

A CRIMSON STAR

Confession is but cowardly when 'tis done
To implicate accomplices, and shield
The guilty perpetrator of a crime;
But when the principal, devoid of hope
Or fear of punishment, lays bare a plot,
Wherein the stigma rests on him alone,
It is a worthy act, approved of God.
Thro' one's own acts, or by another's deeds,
The conscience for a time may die; despair
And rapture may be banished from the heart,
Yet in presagement of impending doom,
Contrition resurrects the faculties,
And tawny day of passion dawns again.

It was within a scope of wide expanse,
Allotted off in squares and tenanted
With citrus fruits and eucalyptus trees;
Hedged round about by palms and pepper-trees,
And performed with a wilderness of flowers;
A brown-stone cottage stood upon a height
That looked serenely on the wild, wide sea;
To seaward, was a vineclad portico
Wherein, upon an antique rustic seat,
Two beings drank the semi-tropic breeze,
Enveloped in the dreamy mists of love.
The man, attired in military garb,
Was tall and straight, with hair of raven hue,
And dark, impassioned eyes that flashed the light
Of tropic fire pent-up within the soul.
The maid was very fair; large braids of hair,
As blonde as new-wrought gold, adorned her head;
Her eyes, ultra-marine, reflected but

The ether of the new-born summer sky.
Her lips were tinted like the June-bred rose,
And all her features were as fair as though
The gods in concert had created them.
She was devoid of blemish, save a smirch,
A star-shaped birthmark, small and crimson hued,
Upon her shapely neck, almost concealed
Beneath her hair; her winsome personage
Was not diminished by this crimson stain;
It was repugnant to but one that one
(Her lover and betrothed by whom she sat)

Abhorred the mark, and supplicated that
It ever be concealed beneath her hair.
Withal, love-passion surged upon his soul,
Engulfing it as breakers do the beach;
And she reciprocated ardent love.

The sun went down behind the ocean's crest,
And crimson-purple-hued reflections fell
Upon the landscape; and anon the rays
Portrayed a subtle mist of molten gold
Upon the cloudless canopy of heaven.
Twilight her sombre wings spread o'er the scene.
And spectral shadows played beneath the trees;
Yet still they sat enwrapped in love's transport,
And wist not that the darkness shrouded them.
The iron gate opened; a stately man
Strode up the terraced walk, and broached them
there.

He clasped the hand of her who recognized
An erst-while friend, Don Pardo, just returned
From distant lands: the military man
Bowed stately to the don, but narrowly

Observed his lady love: he thought he saw
The crimson star assume a livid hue,
A phosphorescent glow, that by degrees,
As incandescent stars eclipsed by mists,
Died out, and vanished from his startled gaze.

But all hallucination pales in love;
Anon the maid became his blushing bride:
A feast ensued, Don Pardo was a guest,
And danced with merry-makers to the swell
Of magic music at the gorgeous ball.
The happy bridegroom and voluptuous bride
Participated in the revelry.
But when Don Pardo but so much as touched
The bride's white silken robe, the husband saw
The crimson star burst into livid glow.

They went upon a tour of many months,
And sipped the sweets of divers foreign climes,
And, in the ecstasies of frenzied love,
The husband soon forgot the crimson star.

Returning to their native land, it was
Embroidered in war: the military man
Was made commander of a regiment,
And ordered forth to battle with the foe.
The stern decree, with consternation fraught,
The officer with free consent obeyed,
And kissing the fond lips of her he loved,
He bade adieu to country and to queen.
Reluctantly, the wife gave her consent;
She rued the fate that separation wrought,
And wept lest she might see her lord no more.

Days, weeks and months elapsed; each waning eve,
The wife sat on the vineclad porch, and heard
The moaning sea; and fishermen relate
That after dusk an apparition sat
Beside her there, tall and of lofty mien,
Resembling much her absent warrior lord.

One evening, one eventful night in June,
The lady occupied the rustic seat,
Imbibing incense from the fragrant flowers,
And from the ocean's spicy breath: also
Beside her sat, with arms entwining her,
The spectre-form the fishermen had seen.
The restless breakers laved the beach, the breeze
Mingled the sea-bird's screech with its own sigh
Through stately palm and arbor-mantled bower,
Subjoined unto the all-absorbing theme,
Detracted them from the surrounding world;
They saw no glimpse, nor heard a stalwart form
That moved with stealthy tread across the lawn,
And paused within a clump of cypress trees.
The ghost in ambush saw the shadows there,
And listening heard the converse of the two:
Concordant music was the voice of one,
The other dire as moanings of the damned.
To calumny and accusation base,
With sobs and tears, the gentle voice rejoined:
"My absent husband you shall not malign,
For were he here he would resent to death
The damning charges you impute to him.
His honor, valor, his unsullied name,
Are free from smirch, are stainless as the stars.
Isn't it enough for you to filch from her
The marriage vows, and by foul lechery

Debase the virtue of the one he loves?
This hour I labour under dire mistrust,
Presentiment I cannot overcome
Forebodeth awful news; last night I dreamed—
May God forbid it was reality—
My absent lord return and stood by me,
A halo hung about his handsome face,
But on his brow appeared a death-like frown,
And fiery passion flashed from out his eyes:

The vision swiftly changed; his flesh dissolved,
And mystic, airy vapors filled the room,
That vanished like the summer mists, and left,
Revealed to view, an armored skeleton.
Thrice I awoke to dream the same again."

The form in ambush saw a livid glow
Beneath the speaker's hair; he shook with rage
As though the fires of hell tormented him:
He drew a sword and stood before his foe,
Who crouched and cowed beside the woman fair,
Commanding in a stentorian tone, "Vile wretch,
Arise and draw, or I must thrust you there."
The form arose, they crossed and parried swords,
But swiftly as the thunderbolts of God
The deed was done—Don Pardo fell a corpse.

The victor gazed upon his swooning love:
The star was dazzling bright, emitting forth
Refulgent sparks, till rocket-like it flashed—
The crimson star went out—his wife was dead.

THE VOLUNTEER'S ADIEU

Awake! I hear the clarion-cry!
Aurora lights the eastern sky,
And morn soars in on wings of gold;
The fragrant flowers and leaves unfold,
The dew-drop glistens on the mold—
Awake! adieu! away!

Awake, adieu, away!—what for?
My country calls, "To arms, to war!"
The foreign foe comes on apace
Our rights and freedom to menace,
My native country to efface—
Awake! adieu! away!

Adieu!—a kiss—thy tears are vain!
Lest I be numbered with the slain,
I swear by God's eternal throne
By deeds of valor to atone
Thy love, and live for thee alone—
Adieu, away, away!

Adieu, away, ambitious steed,
Hie over hill, hie over mead,
No lagging pace must now remind
Of broken ties, of love behind,
To fate I must be—am—resigned—
Adieu, away, away!

Ten legion soldiers, proud and brave,
Accompanies the glad refrain;
Adieu, away!—the armored train
Their nation's fame and flag to save,
Mount to glory or face the grave—
 Adieu, away, away!

YEARNING

Last night I lay upon the clay,
And yet the softest down it seemed,
Bedecked with bowers of fragrant flowers,
And this dear heart, is what I dreamed :

This life's dark night was changed to light,
A halo brighter far than day,
And visions rare, devoid of care,
Trod to and fro the glad highway.

And, of the fair and debonair,
Thyself, thy former self, was one,
As one of heaven with sins forgiven,
Or thou before life's sins begun.

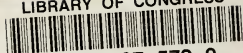
And love returned my spirit burned—
Enchanted fire of life divine—
And must consume till day of doom
This carnal nature to refine.

Last night I lay upon the clay—
Grave that entombs the buried past—
Awoke to fret, ah ! vain regret ;
Would God that sleep had been my last.

LOVE'S ORIGIN

Whence cometh love? 'Tis said by Eros given,
Who vows the germ purloined by him from Heaven.
And if he did it not to us endow,
I fain conjectured whence it came and how.
But why ask me love's origin divine?
My feeble sophistries as well confine
To ascertain its end; for when two souls
Are once enveloped in its subtle folds
Time nor Eternity will extricate,
Nor Destiny alter the dual state—
Forever more the blended two are one—
No power can change—the two exist as one.

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